

Committee on Resources

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STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE WAYNE GILCHREST AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS HEARING

THE DATA COLLECTION PROGRAMS USED BY THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC
ADMINISTRATION FOR MANAGEMENT OF THE NATION'S FISHERY RESOURCES:

June 16, 2004.

Good afternoon. I would like to welcome our witnesses to this hearing.

This afternoon, we will take a look at the wealth of data collection programs undertaken by the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Cooperative Data Collection Programs sponsored by the coastal states.

This hearing promises to flood us with information on the various programs. I realize this will be like drinking from a fire hose, but I think this will give us a solid foundation on the various data collection programs used today so that we can then look at individual data collection programs. It may also be necessary to review an individual fishery's data needs or a region's specific data needs at future hearings.

Our first panel will present us with an explanation of the variety of programs that are currently underway. In addition, we can expect a progress report regarding data deficiencies and measures taken to correct these deficiencies. The fishery managers may also present a bit of a wish list for new programs and funding priorities.

Our second panel will highlight a number of criticisms of the existing programs. I look forward to discussing these concerns as well as any creative ideas for how to reform the current programs.

Having been active in fishery conservation and management for a number of years now, I have often noticed that when people don't like the harvests levels or management measures selected by the fishery managers, they complain about it – sometimes loudly. If that doesn't work, they will often criticize the science behind the decision. And they are not always wrong in their criticisms.

An example may be the recreational harvest levels set by using the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey (MRFSS) program. While this program was never meant to be an in-season management tool, in some cases, it has become the best available science. I don't mean this as a criticism of the program, but I just note that it is used, in some cases, because it may be all we have. I don't mean to single out this program, but I know some of the witnesses on panel two will focus on this program.

It is no secret that fishery managers can always use better data and that it will be harder to criticize management decisions when the regulated community has a hand in the gathering of the data. When people help gather the data and participate in – and understand – the process of making management decisions, they have a harder time being critical. I think NMFS understands this and I think progress has been made. The cooperative research surveys in New England are one example of this progress.

I also note that Congress has asked the National Research Council, on a number of occasions, to step in and give us an unbiased view of NMFS' data collection programs. I think it is healthy to get an outside view and I think NMFS has been receptive to the recommendations that have been made in the past. I hope we will be successful in coming up with a few useful recommendations today.

I yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Pallone, for any opening statement he may have.

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